

MC:AUG/4/70(HEALTH)

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

SPEECH OF MR. CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HEALTH,
AND M.P. FOR MACPHERSON, AT THE BALLOTING OF STALLS
AT BLOCK 69, HAWKER CENTRE, PIPIT ROAD, ON TUESDAY,
4TH AUGUST, 1970 AT 1430 HOURS

It gives me great pleasure to officiate at this balloting of stalls of this newly enlarged Hawker Centre. The pleasure I feel today is not only because this Hawker Centre has been renovated and enlarged as a result of my personal efforts in getting the Housing & Development Board to do it when I visited this Centre with the Chairman and Chief Architect of the Housing & Development Board some time last year, but also because I am in a position to announce today a more positive and concrete policy towards solving the hawker problem in Singapore.

The Government has now decided as a matter of policy to build more markets and hawker centres with the ultimate objective of achieving a long-term solution of getting all hawkers in Singapore to trade inside proper licensed premises. The Government has set the target of the next 5 years within which to plan, construct and complete adequate indoor accommodation for the permanent resiting of all the hawkers in Singapore who are at the moment occupying our backlanes, side-streets and open spaces. The Housing & Development Board which have had the experience of building the thousands of low cost housing units for our people have been assigned the task of constructing these premises for hawker resiting.

Initially the Housing & Development Board would put up 3 hawker centres for the current fiscal year and from the experience gained in regard to design and architecture of these 3 proposed centres, more centres would be built with improved designs. Suitable sites will be allocated including some in the city centre earmarked for urban renewal for the construction of these hawker centres. Of course, what is equally vital is that Government will have to provide the funds to finance these hawker centre projects. Stalls at these centres will be rented out at subsidised rentals.

Although up to date much have been done in tackling the hawker problem, real progress towards the long-term solution has been painfully slow. In fact, what has been achieved so far has been in the field of control, licensing and resiting hawkers into backlanes and side-streets, open spaces and car parks, so that our main thoroughfares

can be kept free for the ever increasing vehicular traffic. This was started in 1966 and is only a temporary short-term solution. More recently we have succeeded in getting our hawkers to keep their pitches and surroundings clean. But by putting our hawkers in our side-streets and backlanes does to some extent defeat our very objective of making Singapore clean, healthy and attractive garden city. Although our inspectors can control the hawkers from dumping their solid waste into the drains of these backlanes, the liquid waste or sullage that comes from the washings of these hawkers must inevitably pollute our drains and waterways with the consequent smell nuisance and so on. Thus a long-term solution of the hawker problem must be found that is consistent with our Government's effort of providing a better and more healthy environment for our people to live in.

In implementing this new policy of providing permanent indoor accommodation for our hawkers Government will in the next five years be expending quite a substantial portion of our resources in terms of funds and valuable land sites. Is this justifiable? A great deal of thought and consideration has been gone into in evolving this new policy for hawkers. There is one school of thought which holds the view that hawkers should now be eradicated completely from the face of Singapore since hawking is only a disguised form of unemployment and we are now entering a state of full employment. However, Government has taken the view that hawkers do serve a need in our society. In fact they have been responsible in keeping down retail prices and hence the cost of living of the ordinary people.

However, at the same time I must warn that this new policy of building permanent indoor accommodation to house our hawkers only applies to existing hawkers and not to new ones. It will apply only to the 24,045 hawkers in Singapore whose particulars were recorded in a census undertaken by the Health Ministry between December 1968 and February 1969. There is no reason why with the present shortage of labour in Singapore there should be new persons who should take to hawking.

Finally, may I say a few words to those who have been successful in today's balloting for the new hawkers stalls. They must realise that much public funds have gone into the building of these new hawkers stalls which they have the privilege to occupy to do their business under proper shelter instead of having no shelter to brave the elements outside. Although they do pay rentals for the stalls, but these are highly subsidised. They have therefore in return to see to it that their stalls should be kept clean all the time so that members of the public can shop in clean surroundings and in comfort.